

East Germany's Deceptive Detente

By JOHN M. STARRELS

East German leader Erich Honecker's trip to West Germany next month signifies his country's new status as the unlikely repository of Western hopes for renewing the dormant East-West dialogue. These hopes should be quashed.

The scene was set when Mr. Honecker joined with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl during Yuri Andropov's funeral to draft a joint German statement underlining their common belief in the "existential importance" of preventing nuclear war. This was followed by the Bonn government's recent granting of a bank guarantee to East Germany of \$330 million in exchange for easing of travel restrictions. This comes on top of a \$370 million loan to East Germany last summer.

Mr. Kohl has not acted alone. East Germany has lately been inundated by non-German Western suitors in search of a dialogue on how to reduce military and political tensions between the blocs. The list includes the U.S. assistant secretary of state for European affairs, Richard Burt; French Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson; Canada's then prime minister, Pierre Trudeau, and Britain's Margaret Thatcher.

The West's near-infatuation with East Germany stems from a more calculated belief that in time Mr. Honecker could become the West's silent Eastern partner in persuading Moscow to return to the bargaining table.

A Mild Dissent

That is a tantalizing idea, and in light of recent events there are some signs that Mr. Honecker is prepared to take small initiatives on his own to encourage a more conciliatory Soviet approach toward the West. For instance, the East German party chief delivered a mild, but no less unprecedented, dissent from Soviet policy when he confessed he was less than "overjoyed" at the deployment of SS-20s on his territory after the collapse of the Geneva negotiations. Likewise, East Germany's Communist Party daily, Neues Deutschland, uncharacteristically printed a Hungarian retort to a Czechoslovak charge—encouraged, no doubt, by Moscow—that various unnamed East Bloc countries (i.e. Hungary, Romania and East Germany) had strayed outside the acceptable boundaries of Soviet policy in their desire to reach accommodation with the West. The East Germans are still doggedly preparing for Mr. Honecker's visit to Mr. Kohl even at the risk of incurring Soviet displeasure. Moscow, it now appears, is a bit unnerved at the idea of a separate East German approach toward the West German "class enemy."

But suppose these juicy morsels give us reason to believe that Mr. Honecker now enjoys some marginal room for maneuver toward the West. The question remains:

Does the West gain any advantages from accommodating East Germany?

It is at least arguable that the domestic structure of a state need not detract from its foreign-policy initiatives. Nevertheless, the militarization of East German society is hardly a reassuring sign that Mr. Honecker wants to live in peace. East Germany, with a population of only 17 million, has an astounding 1.2 million men under arms. To which must be added the most tangible symbols of East German political life: the Berlin Wall, constructed 23 years ago this week, and the deadly border, still replete with automatic shooting devices and watchtowers. When East German diplomats talk about creating preconditions for "peace," what kind of "peace" do they have in mind? And for whom?

Indeed, one of the sinister ironies surrounding East Germany's peace campaign in the West is the simultaneous acceleration of domestic militarization. Since 1976, paramilitary training has become mandatory in schools, despite the opposition of East Germany's Roman Catholic and Protestant communities. The West German newspaper Die Welt reports that fifth-grade students are being instructed in the use of *hand grenades*. Likewise, the 1982 Law on Military Service now makes the drafting of women between the ages of 18 and 50 obligatory in the event of a national emergency.

More ominously, East German military doctrine candidly envisions the conduct of a "just" nuclear war. "We do not accept the view held by progressive people in the peace movement that a just war is no longer possible in the atomic age," declared East Germany's defense minister, Heinz Hoffmann, during the height of detente in 1975. A longtime analyst of East Germany, Joachim Nawrocki, who writes for the Hamburg weekly Die Zeit, explains: East German "military doctrine holds that such a war can be waged, won and morally justified."

The opposition to the growing tide of militarism isn't tolerated by Mr. Honecker. His dreaded State Security Service has ruthlessly moved against East Germany's intelligentsia, precipitating in turn the largest exodus of "progressive" artists, writers and scientists from German soil since the Third Reich.

And just how peaceful is East Germany on the international front? Not very. Since

the late 1960s the country has been used as a training ground for terrorist groups. According to reliable Israeli intelligence sources, the notorious terrorist Carlos has been given asylum in East Berlin since he was implicated earlier this year in the bombing of a French train. And throughout the Third World, East German police and security cadres are assisting Marxist clients in the creation of the most advanced instruments of mass control, while providing round-the-clock protection for Libya's Col. Muammar Qadhafi.

Closer to home, Mr. Honecker's conciliatory rhetoric also seems at odds with recent history. Ten years ago, West German Chancellor Willy Brandt—the architect of intra-German detente—was forced to resign after the belated discovery of an East German spy in his coterie. The spy had used his carefully cultivated access to smuggle important security papers to his East German employers. Indulging the East Germans has unfortunately become a favorite pastime of the West Germans lately. Mr. Brandt may have set the precedent back then, at the time of the spy discovery, when he strangely turned his venom, not on Mr. Honecker and his secret service, but on the opposition Christian Democrats. He accused them of politicizing the issue when they called for an overhaul of the government's counterintelligence service.

Venial Diplomacy

Finally, though Mr. Honecker may see himself as a representative of European interests, reality still forces him to acknowledge, and respect, the role of the U.S. in any future negotiations between East and West. As we approach the 10th anniversary of official U.S.-East German relations, the Honecker regime's public diplomacy toward the U.S. has been venial and thoroughly counterproductive. This record, it must be noted, has not discouraged some American and West German analysts from promoting a "special relationship" between Washington and East Berlin. Not unlike the Western fascination with Yuri Andropov a few years ago, the German scholarly set has recently adopted "Erich" as a man of peace and moderation. Fortunately, however, the U.S. has chosen to approach East Germany with a greater sense of realism than West Germany.

In time, perhaps, Mr. Honecker may become a valuable diplomatic asset for the West. For the present, the West would be well advised to channel its energies into more plausible, and worthy, endeavors.

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